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BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

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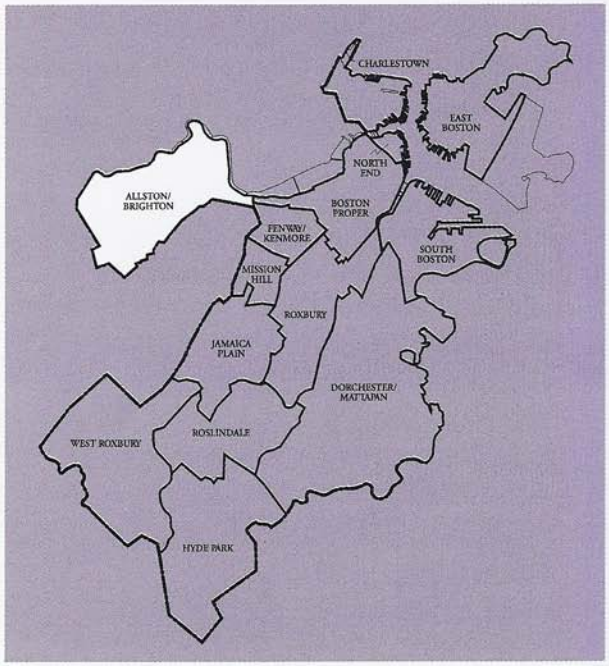
ALLSTON/ BRIGHTON

Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods

BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

When Allston/Brighton was part of Cambridge, local farmers used its land to graze their cattle. During the Revolutionary War, the Brighton Cattle Market was started to feed George Washington's troops, beginning a tradition of butchering that lasted until the 1950s.



Allston/Brighton became a center of horticulture and market gardening for much of the 19th century. Eventually, land once used for agriculture and livestock was converted for housing developments and the institutions that are now prominent local landmarks.

The Market Street Burying Ground, just off Washington Street in Brighton Center, served the community from 1764 until 1850.

"LITTLE CAMBRIDGE"

The land that now makes up Allston/Brighton was originally part of Watertown when the Massachusetts Bay Colony was first settled in 1630. A few years later, the area was given to Cambridge and was known as "Little Cambridge" until 1807 when it became the independent town of Brighton. Early ferries across the Charles River to Cambridge and Watertown operated in the area of the Soldiers Field Road Extension, and in 1663, the colony constructed The Great Bridge at the current North Harvard Street crossing.

A number of Cambridge families moved to the south side of the river, but the community grew slowly until after the Revolutionary War. During these years, the neighborhood began the process of separation from Cambridge, establishing its own school, meetinghouse, and burying ground. Among the early families who were to leave a lasting mark on the Brighton community were the Gardners, Sparhawks, and Winships. Thomas Gardner was a Revolutionary War hero whose house, at 26-28 Higgins Street, is one of the few 18th-century dwellings still standing in the neighborhood. The Sparhawk House (45-47 Murdock Street), built in 1802 in the post-Revolutionary Federal style, is the earliest house in the Brighton Center area.

THE CATTLE MARKET BEGINS

The Winship house no longer stands, but this family also left an enduring imprint on Brighton. In 1775, Jonathan Winship and his son, also named Jonathan,

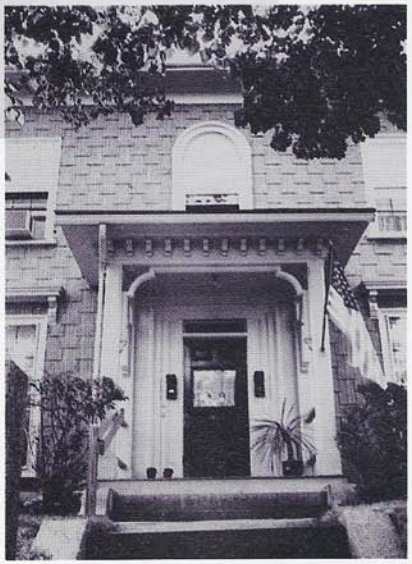
founded the Little Cambridge Cattle Market to provision General Washington and the Continental Army, who were headquartered in Cambridge. The Winship slaughterhouse was located near the intersection of Chestnut Hill Avenue and Academy Hill Road. From this beginning grew the renowned Brighton Cattle Show and Fair and the neighborhood's nearly two centuries as a center of butchering.

A GARDEN SPOT

The next generation of Winships was just as influential – Jonathan Winship III, involved in the family's Pacific trade, returned to Brighton from China in 1818 with new-found expertise in horticulture. He opened Winship Gardens, a nursery with display gardens that stretched from the intersection of Faneuil and Market streets to the river. It was the first of many enterprises that made Brighton a center of horticulture and market gardening by the middle of the 19th century.

THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD

In 1834, the Boston & Worcester Railroad began to run through Brighton, opening its first station, Brighton Depot, within Winship Gardens. By making downtown Boston easily accessible for the first time, the railroad began the suburbanization of the country town. Affluent commuters mingled with cattle dealers, and both built freestanding houses in popular styles that recalled the ancient Greek republic, the rustic Italian countryside, and the double-pitched mansard roofs of Paris. Developers also built more modest suburban houses on speculation. The one- and two-family mansards on Bigelow Street, probably built soon after the street was laid out in 1858, were part of this trend. Shortly after the Faneuil railroad station opened at Brook Street in the 1860s, developer George W. Gerrish constructed a row of brick and stone mansard-style double cottages nearby on Newton Street; most remain today.



Built for wealthy Brighton cattleman Stephen Hastings Bennett, this house at 291 Market is decorated by brackets that characterize the Italianate style.

Courtesy of SPNEA

The Richardsonian Romanesque-style Allston Depot, completed in 1887, is built of pink granite with contrasting brownstone trim.

ALLSTON COMES OF AGE

A third local railroad station was built in 1867 at the intersection of Cambridge and Harvard streets. This area had previously been known as Cambridge Crossing, but at the urging of a group of prominent local citizens, it was renamed after the noted local artist Washington Allston.

The development of the Allston Depot attracted Boston professionals, who built substantial suburban houses nearby. The first wooden station was replaced in 1887 by a grand stone building that still stands at 353 Cambridge Street. It was built under the direction of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, the successor to the firm of H.H. Richardson (1838-1886), the famed architect of Trinity Church in Copley Square. Richardson himself may have made the original drawings for the Allston Depot.

A TIME OF CHANGE

After 1860, farming declined in Allston/Brighton, and in 1873, the neighborhood was annexed to Boston. During this time, public

health concerns about the local slaughterhouses led to the formation of the Brighton Abattoir, a monopoly butchering facility located near the river, removed from the earlier location at Brighton Center. The stockyards followed, relocating near the Brighton Depot. During the 1870s, refrigerated railroad cars began to undercut the local trade by bringing meat from the West. By the 1880s, the Brighton Abattoir began to specialize in kosher butchering, which requires local facilities. The abattoir was demolished in the 1950s to make way for the Soldiers Field Road Extension.

THE WATERWORKS AT CHESTNUT HILL

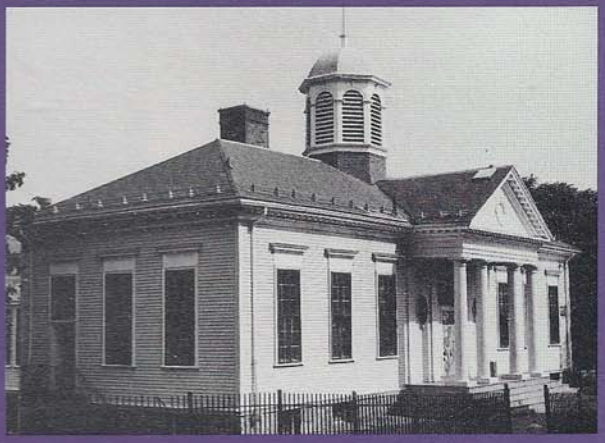
Public health concerns were also a driving force behind the waterworks complex at the Chestnut Hill Reservoir, which brought fresh water to Boston by aqueduct from various sources west of the city. When it opened in 1870, the reservoir distributed water by gravity, but as Boston annexed more areas with higher elevations – including Brighton – pumping services soon became necessary. By the turn of the century, the Metropolitan Water Board had constructed two pumping stations along the scenic drive at Chestnut Hill. The High Service Pumping Station was built to

Courtesy of The Bostonian Society

▲ **The High Service Pumping Station shows the asymmetry and boldness of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.**

BOSTON LANDMARK

Oak Square School



Built in 1894 at the intersection of Tremont and Nonantum streets, the Oak Square School is the only wooden schoolhouse remaining in Boston. City Architect Edmund M. Wheelwright designed the original two-room building in the Colonial Revival style that recalls the buildings of 18th-century America. The balanced, classical design draws the eye upward from the central portico, supported by four Doric columns and reached by a broad flight of steps, to the crowning octagonal cupola. The rear bay was added in 1923. The building has since been converted into condominiums.

Edmund M. Wheelwright was responsible for many Boston school buildings during his term as city architect (1891-1895). He wrote a nationally influential book about school design, promoting the view that children learn better in well-lighted, well-ventilated, well-constructed buildings. He also founded a successful private firm and designed many important structures in Boston.

As an official Boston Landmark, this building is protected from changes that would adversely affect its historic character. For information on designating local landmark buildings and districts, please contact the Boston Landmarks Commission at 635-3850.

The Brighton Police Station exhibits neoclassical features – a symmetrical plan, central Palladian window, and entrance portico (now removed).

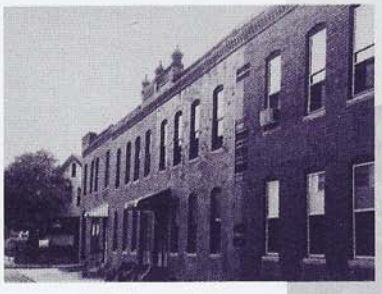
pump water with powerful steam engines to high elevations at Fisher Hill and Parker Hill so it could then be distributed by gravity. This building, completed in 1888, was designed by Boston City Architect Arthur Vinal in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. By 1898, a second, lower-pressure pumping station was begun to expand service to lower downtown elevations. The Low Service Pumping Station building contrasts with its predecessor – it was designed in the symmetrical Beaux-Arts Classical style by Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge.

The waterworks complex, now an official Boston Landmark, also includes two gate houses and several other ancillary buildings. In addition, the High Service building contains a virtual museum of technology which has been designated a national engineering landmark. The reservoir served metropolitan Boston until the 1940s. The complex is now owned by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority.

Courtesy of SPNEA

COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

A boom in civic building occurred in the decade following Allston/Brighton's annexation to Boston. Dating from this time are distinguished buildings by a series of city architects. These include Engine House #34 (circa 1889) at 444 Western Avenue, by Charles J. Bateman; the Harvard Avenue Fire Station (circa 1891) at Harvard and Cambridge streets, by Harrison Atwood; the Brighton Police Station (1893) at 301 Washington Street; and Brighton High School (1894, now Taft Junior High School) at 704 Cambridge Street, both by Edmund M. Wheelwright.



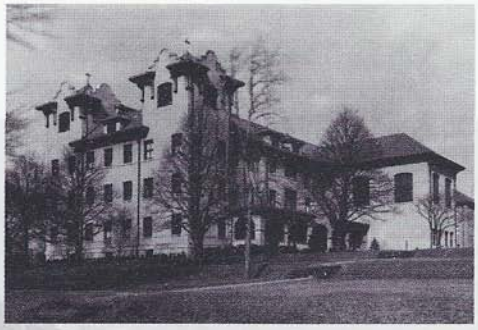
A STREETCAR SUBURB

Although the railroad helped Allston/Brighton grow, electric streetcar service, which began in 1889, dramatically increased the pace of development. Within a few years, the neighborhood became a streetcar suburb, accessible to a wider economic range of residents. Multifamily buildings became more plentiful, and industry expanded as farmland was sold off and workers moved in. These opportunities allowed the economy to expand beyond agriculture and food processing. An example was the recently demolished Sewall & Day Cordage Works, a large rope-making factory complex (342 Western Avenue) built in 1887.

"LITTLE ROME" ON BRIGHTON'S HILLS

During the 19th century, Roman Catholic immigrants from Ireland and Italy were drawn to Brighton by plentiful employment and affordable housing, and soon St. Columbkille's parish was established. The current church on Market Street was completed in stages between 1875 and 1880 in the Vic-

These Queen Anne-style rowhouses at the intersection of Raymond and Franklin streets date from 1889 and were probably built for the workers at Sewall and Day.



Courtesy of Lucy Tempesta

St. Gabriel's Monastery has all the hallmarks of the Mission Revival style – stucco facade, tile roof, arcaded porch, and shaped gables.

torian Gothic style, with the towers added at the turn of the century.

In the years between 1880 and 1912, as old Yankee families sold their hilltop Brighton estates, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese bought up property that would otherwise have been subdivided for housing. St. John's Seminary, on the east side of Lake Street, begun in 1881, was built in the Chateauesque style from puddingstone quarried on the site. The Religious of the Cenacle came to Nonantum Hill in 1911. The present Modern Gothic-style convent, by noted architects Maginnis and Walsh – designers of Boston College, Emmanuel College, and many other Roman Catholic institutions – was begun in 1922.

The St. Gabriel's Monastery complex, adjacent to St. Elizabeth's Hospital at Cambridge and Washington streets, was built in stages from 1909 to 1965 by the Passionist order; it is now used by St. Elizabeth's Hospital for a variety of functions. The complex includes the picturesque Mission Revival-style monastery building by local architect T. Edward Sheehan, constructed in 1909 and now an official Boston Landmark. The church building, designed by Maginnis and Walsh and completed in 1929, is reminiscent of early Christian churches in northern Italy.

CHANGE ALONG THE CHARLES

In 1890, Harvard University purchased 80 acres from an Allston farmer to expand its campus. This area is now home to Harvard Stadium (1903), the first college stadium in the U.S., designed by the nationally prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White. After the turn of the century, the riverfront was cleared of its wharves and warehouses as the Metropolitan Park Commission developed the entire Charles River Basin as a recreational facility. In 1927, the Harvard Business School complex, also designed by McKim, Mead & White and based on classical models, was completed across North Harvard Street from the stadium.

The U-shaped Harvard Stadium, based on models from Roman antiquity, is a pioneering example of reinforced concrete construction.

TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

An unusual type of suburban development was laid out in the 1890s in the area known as Aberdeen, north of newly completed Beacon Street. Taking advantage of the natural contours of the rocky land, picturesque, curving streets with Scottish names such as Kinross and Lothian were built and lined with large, rustic Shingle-style houses. A good examples is the stone and frame house at 14 Selkirk Road, built about 1900.

At the same time, local boosters were eagerly promoting the development of Commonwealth Avenue, spurred on by the rapid rise in land values on nearby Beacon Street. They foresaw a similar broad, landscaped avenue lined with substantial apartment buildings, but progress was slow because of the financial panic of 1893 and competition from Beacon Street. It was not until the years from 1910 to 1925 that full-scale development came to Commonwealth Avenue.

Courtesy of The Bostonian Society